



city of
greenville

News Release

BELOVED ELEPHANT PASSES AWAY EN ROUTE TO CHEYENNE MOUNTAIN ZOO

Age-related conditions likely cause Joni's death

Greenville, S.C. – Greenville Zoo and Cheyenne Mountain Zoo are mourning the loss of Joni (known to the community as “Joy”), a beloved 44-year-old elderly African elephant, who passed away suddenly while en route to Cheyenne Mountain Zoo from the Greenville Zoo. She was being transported because both zoos believed she would receive better geriatric care and have more opportunities for socialization at her new home in Colorado Springs.

“Our entire zoo family is heartbroken over this profound loss,” said Jeff Bullock, Greenville Zoo Director. “Joni will be mourned not only by our community, but also the Colorado Springs community who were excited to welcome her to their family.”

Having an animal pass away during transport is a rare occurrence for Association of Zoos and Aquariums institutions, but the older and larger an animal is, the more complications a move can have. Cheyenne Mountain Zoo and Greenville Zoo worked together to ensure the best possible outcome for Joni during her move.

“We knew there was risk involved in transporting Joni because of her age,” Bob Chastain, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo President and CEO, said. “But we also knew that she deserved the very best end-of-life care, and we wanted the chance to give that to her. We are sad for both the community of Greenville, as they mourn the loss of an elephant they knew for almost her entire life, and for the community of Colorado Springs, who will never get a chance to meet her.”

“In case of emergency, a car with Greenville Zoo’s veterinarian and head elephant keeper followed Joni all the way from South Carolina,” Chastain said. “They monitored her at every stop, and nine zoos along the way were on standby to help them if the need arose. Despite all the precautions taken, Joni passed so quickly that nothing could be done for her.”

The decision to move Joni from Greenville Zoo to Cheyenne Mountain Zoo was made entirely with Joni's best interest in mind. She had ailments that Cheyenne Mountain Zoo's veterinary and keeper staff were confident they could manage. The move was also vital because Joni was the sole remaining elephant at the Greenville Zoo, and social interaction with a herd is imperative for an elephant's mental well-being.

"We still know in our hearts that moving Joni to Colorado was the best decision for her long-term care," said Bullock. "Joni needed companionship, and it would have been unfair to her to continue to live the remainder of her life alone."

A necropsy, post-mortem examination, will be performed by both Cheyenne Mountain Zoo and Greenville Zoo veterinary staff to determine Joni's cause of death.

About the Greenville Zoo

Accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), the Greenville Zoo is rated one of the best tourist attractions in South Carolina, attracting over 270,000 people annually. Operated by the City of Greenville, the 14-acre facility features wildlife from around the world, including orangutans, giraffes, monkeys and giant tortoises. Visitors can also enjoy one of the zoo's most popular exhibits, the Reptile Building, which is home to a variety of lizards, frogs, turtles and snakes. For more information about the Greenville Zoo, visit www.greenvillezoo.com or follow the zoo on Facebook at facebook.com/greenvillezoo.

About Cheyenne Mountain Zoo

The Cheyenne Mountain Zoological Society was founded in 1926. Today, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, America's ONLY mountain zoo, offers comprehensive education programs, exciting conservation efforts and truly fantastic animal experiences. It is Cheyenne Mountain Zoo's hope that guests fall in love with animals and nature, and take action to protect them. Of the 224 zoos and aquariums accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Cheyenne Mountain Zoo is one of just nine operating without tax support. Cheyenne Mountain Zoo depends on admissions, membership dues and donations for funding.

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